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ABSTRACT

The principal aims of this symposium were to examine how the teaching of grammar could be brought up to date, to define the role of linguistics in teacher training and in the classroom, and to determine the extent to which grammar is a genuine aid to the learning and teaching of modern languages. The report contains the following information: (1) introductory note, (2) summary of proceedings, (3) group reports and recommendations, (4) conclusions and recommendations, (5) rapporteur's final summary, and (6) a list of participants. (RL)

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COMMITTEE FOR GENERAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Symposium on
"The place of grammer in
modern methods of language teaching"

Brussels, 16 - 20 November 1970

REPORT

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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I. Introductory note

Research into new techniques of modern language teaching during the past decade has been principally devoted to the introduction of audio-visual methodology and the associated hardware. Meanwhile, a revolution has taken place in concepts of grammar and the analysis of language itself, epitomised by the work of Chomsky and others in developing the concepts of transformational and generative grammar.

The principal aim of this symposium was to examine how the teaching of grammar could be brought up to date, the role of linguistics in teacher training and in the classroom itself and, most important of all, the extent to which grammar is a genuine aid to the learning and teaching of modern languages.

The programme of the symposium included lectures, group work and plenary sessions. The lectures provided an excellent stimulus for the group work and summaries, or the complete texts of the lectures are given in the appendices.

Representatives of all the member States of the Council for Cultural Co-operation, with the exception of Malta and Greece attended the symposium. Observers were also present from the German Association for Applied Linguistics, Belgian Teachers' Associations and SHAPE.

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II. Summary of proceedings

A. Mr. VANBERGEN opened the meeting and welcomed the participants.

MM. VAN ASSCHE, for the Dutch-speaking Minister Vermylen, and CALIER, for the French-speaking Minister Dubois, stressed how interested the Ministers for National Education were in the Major Project for Modern Languages, particularly in view of the fundamental reforms of education currently being carried out in Belgium along the lines of the work undertaken by the Council of Europe.

Mr. AXON apologised for MM. NEUMANN, BEMTGEN and NORD, who regretted that they could not be present at this symposium. Mentioning the fact that meetings of the present type are now called "symposia", Mr. Axon quoted the three definitions of "symposium" given in the Concise Oxford Dictionary. He expressed the wish that the conclusions and recommendations reached by the present meeting should apply not only to secondary education, but that they will also bear in mind other levels, primary, post secondary and adult education. It was equally important to enlist the co-operation of governmental departments and of non-governmental organisations in disseminating the recommendations of meetings of this sort.

B. The action of the CCC in modern language teaching

Dr. RIDDY recalled "the action undertaken by the Council of Europe in the field of modern language teaching". A resume of his text is document DECS/EGT (70) 77.

The following points were raised during the discussion:

- are university faculties and language departments sufficiently aware of the action of the CCC?
- does not the spirit of philology and "pure science" exert too much influence in the training of teachers and in school curricula?
- what steps could be suggested to remedy the lack of interaction between the secondary and higher levels of language teaching?
- how can the publications of the Council of Europe reach a wider audience?

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In answer to these comments, it was pointed out:

1. that the importance of the divisions between the various levels of education concerned diminished in relevance; at meetings such as the Skepparholmen symposium October 1970) on university teaching and the Ruschlikon symposium (Switzerland) 1971, devoted to adult education, the teaching of modern languages at other levels were also being taken into consideration;

2. that the role of national modern language correspondents was to give as wide a diffusion as possible to the conclusions, recommendations and publications of the Council of Europe (i.a. Education and Culture);

3. that numerous projects existed for establishing university centres for languages and linguistics, covering all aspects of the learning and teaching of languages;

4. that research needs to be undertaken into the selection of "non-literary" new material that will make it easier to achieve the goals suggested at the Ostia symposium.

5. long training periods abroad seem essential if future teachers are to know foreign civilisations better, as well as their language.

C. Recent work in English grammar

Professor PALMER, spoke of recent developments in English grammar (a resume of Professor Palmer's talk is in document DECS/EGT (70) 70. The following points were raised during the discussion:

(a) that Professor Palmer's theories were difficult to apply to teaching,

(b) that specialised grammars should be made for students in different countries (e.g. an English grammar for Italian students, etc.),

(c) it is difficult to test the proposals, and even more difficult to find solutions to the problems raised by Professor Palmer. Linguists are trying by very different methods to test and classify languages but it is only when an observed phenomenon does not belong to any other structure that it can be put into a particular category,

(d) context, intonation and tempo are important in determining the nature of a particular structure.

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D. Grammar models and their application in the teaching of modern languages

Dr. ROULET (Switzerland) talked on "Grammar models and their application to modern language teaching"; the full text of his lecture is in document : CCC/ESR (70) 66 .

Dr. Roulet added the following points to his talk:

The problem of grammar is generally tackled from the wrong angle. Too often we start from the description of the language from the linguist's point of view, instead of from the needs of teachers and students, and without taking "levels" into account. Consequently, we should:

1. analyse the linguistic needs of the community; define the knowledge required by the various types of students, professions, age and ability levels.

2. define the objectives of each type of language teaching for a particular motivation; determine the degree of oral and written understanding, and of spoken and written expression required.

3. define the course content and identify the different levels of grammatical, lexical and syntatical knowledge.

4. determine the function and the place of grammar more precisely. This initiative must come, not from the linguists but from teachers who must put pressure on the linguists to explore hitherto neglected fields (e.g. the analysis of dialogue, of speech, leading to composition).

The field where we have least information, is in the learning of strategy that depends upon psychology. With the possible exception of the United Kingdom, psycho-linguists are rare.

The following points were raised in discussion:

- Greater stress should be laid upon the positive aspect of structuralism in teaching, especially in the initial stages (determination of course material).

- In what order can these structures be classified? Experience has shown that basic "situations" - dialogues - determine the order as long as they are relevant, logical and correspond to the age and interests of the students.

- Should not language learning be accompanied by reflection as to how the language works? Wouldn't this be a sort of "short cut" that would make learning easier?

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- In secondary education should not a linguistic understanding of the mother tongue be taken as a starting point? This does not seem simple for children of 10 or 11 years of age, who are not capable of abstraction.

- It is necessary to make a distinction between the spoken (pronunciation, intonation as opposed to the graphic aspect) and the written language. The basic material should be inspired by the real spoken language. No grammar has yet studied these differences. It is important to specify the limits of what is suitable to secondary education in this field. Should we just teach an everyday language, suitable for simple holiday use, or should we develop the possibilities of each student in order to increase his knowledge and develop his intelligence as much as possible? The danger of substituting for the "traditional" theoretical grammar an equally theoretical "modern" grammar could not be ignored.

Dr. Roulet then summed up the discussion.

It ought to be possible to take into account the frequency, complexity and extent of structures and establish a hierarchy or presentation order initially dependent upon basic situations and frequencies.

Reflection on the nature of language is certainly necessary at university and adult levels, but in Geneva a successful experiment in secondary education has been carried out. Dr. Roulet considered children quite capable of abstraction, experience acquired in modern mathematics bore this out. It was essential to decide whether grammar is taught for itself and for the analysis that it entails or simply for communication purposes; this was also a question of "levels". Students should be accustomed at an early stage to hearing samples of spoken and written languages of various levels.

E. Contrastive Linguistics

A. Professor NICKEL (Stuttgart) spoke on "German and English as source languages and target languages - languages from the point of view of contrastive linguistics" (the full text of Professor Nickel's contribution is in document DECS/EGT (71) 7.

Professor Nickel first of all stressed the growing importance of contrastive linguistics. Centres existed in Zagreb, Poznan, Bucarest, Besançon and Stuttgart amongst others. However, the possibilities of contrastive linguistics should not be overestimated. Its aims can be summed up as follows:

1. to contribute to the search for "universals", by carefully comparing two languages;

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2. to make a contribution to the field of translation and particularly the development of translating machines.

The contribution of contrastive linguistics to the teaching of language is only one of its aspects. CL could help in the constitution of basic material for teaching and its "error analysis" (lapsology) could be a useful guide for teachers.

Most methods for foreigners (Deutsch für Ausländer, etc.) failed because they did not take into account the students' mother tongues. Contrastive linguistics is based on two axioms: that the learning of the mother tongue is a "sui generis" process and that the learning of a foreign language differs according to whether it was preceded or not by the learning of the mother tongue. Right from the start there is a linguistic "matrix" the role of which depends upon the age, type of student, etc.

Professor Nickel then commented upon the charts (cf. Appendix V) which show the various stages the student goes through in the two types of learning. The role played by the mother tongue in the "decoding" should be stressed. Nevertheless, the direct method should not be abandoned. It can even be said that contrastive linguistics gives it new reasons for existing and being practised. It is not the student who must be faced with "contrasts" and differences but the teacher must know them so that he can predict and avoid mistakes. So the teacher should be well acquainted with the students' mother tongue, that is, of course, as long as he is dealing with homogeneous groups. It should be pointed out that the influence of a language is felt in both directions.

As far as the analysis of mistakes is concerned, contrastive linguistics highlights other factors than the influence of the mother tongue. In particular, that of a second or third foreign language, intra-structural interferences (confusion language), excess of drills or structures that lead to mistaken generalisations. Here, Professor Nickel referred to a work by P. Corder, cf. Appendix V.

Anyway, contrastive linguistics cannot list all sources of error. The first requirement is to carry out a thorough analysis of the two "contrasted" languages and to highlight their differences. Much remains to be done in that field. For practical reasons, we have to carry out simultaneously analyses of the two languages and that of the mistakes. Even though the basic principle is not new, what had been done was not sufficient. The "lapsology" project has three aspects: the description of the mistakes, the search for the causes and the therapy.

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What the teacher wants us to do is not only to describe the mistakes (that he knows by experience) but their causes and the practical means (exercises) to correct them.

Here, two schools are in conflict. Should one be very severe towards the errors committed or should one, on the contrary, be more lenient towards students who make these mistakes due to the interference of their mother tongue? In view of the natural, almost normal character of these mistakes, we are inclined to adopt the second attitude, and, if necessary, be more severe later on.

Another problem exists: should one begin by teaching those linguistic phenomena which present differences, or on the contrary, start with the analogies? A genuinely contrastive method would be to adopt the second solution: to go from the easy to the complex. But compromises are necessary, especially if one starts from natural situations, from situation dialogues (cf. Appendix V).

Finally, Professor Nickel pointed out that the systematic description of the two "contrasted" languages contributes to more precise observation and to the drawing up of more practical rules. In this respect, similar models in both languages should be adhered to strictly.

B. Professor Nickel's speech gave rise to the following questions or comments: do not the diagrams ignore the simultaneous nature of certain steps that are presented here as a succession?

Professor Nickel recognised the oversimplifying nature of the diagrams. What he wanted to show first of all was the essentially different nature of the approach in learning, between that of the mother tongue and the target language. As to the decoding it is true that we do not know much about this process. We look to the psycho-linguists to analyse that phenomenon.

Teachers cannot be given fool-proof recipes. The only thing we can give them is a detailed and comparative description of the two languages, and suggest ways of establishing a hierarchy in learning. We can tell you, for example, if you should teach: I read or I am reading. We have not yet been able to work out the material. All teachers do not consider mistakes in the same way, each one has to adopt a point of view. We suggest criteria to help you in your choice. And we also offer working tools for those who do not have an intuitive turn of mind.

Our role can also be important when it comes to estimating errors. We believe that contrastive linguistics can be of interest in adult education, for those who are learning translation at a high level where it can be considered less harmful than in the initial stages of learning. Finally, Professor Nickel stated that an experiment was being carried out in Munich where a course based on contrastive linguistics was being used in the primary schools.

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F. The teaching of English in Sweden

(A) Mr. Sven-G. Johansson spoke on the Swedish experience in the field of modern languages. He retraced the successive stages of grammar teaching, from the deductive (grammatical rule to be learnt by heart, examples with translation into the mother tongue, exercises, etc.) to the inductive stage, ending up with the 1969 curriculum with the following aims, including the teaching of grammar:

1. to enable students to understand the spoken language

2. to enable students to talk the language in situations drawn from everyday life

3. to enable them to read easy texts

4. to enable them to express themselves understandably in writing

5. to give them a certain knowledge of the country of the language they are studying and to initiate them into the civilisation and culture of that country.

The order in which these points are listed did not imply any particular priority. Compulsory education had increased the number of students continuing from lower to higher secondary education (a 40% increase over the past ten years). Since classes were necessarily heterogeneous, special activities have been foreseen for less gifted children. Thus, special tasks can be assigned to pupils who have some difficulty with written examinations.

The methodological recommendations provided by the central authorities mentioned the following points:

1. grammar should be presented within a context. It will be carefully structured and will make use of "micro-dialogues"

2. grammar should be functional

3. the cognitive element should not be neglected

4. a grammatical rule can never replace an exercise

5. comments, résumés and rules can form a whole, making learning easier for students

6. it is necessary to have a course in which grammar is integrated.

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(B) Discussion. The following questions were asked:

- Rather than impose the same teaching methods on heteregeneous classes, would it not be better to form homogeneous classes with text-books and other didactic material suited to their ability level?

- What is the place given to literature in English, French and German curricula.

- How does the Swedish system organise special activities for different levels of pupil ability?

- Does the fact that classical literature is studied to a very small extent represent an obstacle to the overall understanding of the civilisation and culture of the people whose language is being studied? How is it intended to prepare pupils for their later studies, where literature will necessarily play a part?

- What do modern linguistics contribute to the creation of methods and text-books? Are scientific data integrated into the language courses?

- How can one remedy the lack of interest shown by certain pupils at various stages of learning, for example when they are initiated into the written form of the language?

Mr. Johansson summed up the discussion by saying that:

- Compulsory education in Sweden owes its present form to legislation. It does not seem probable that existing provisions will change unless public opinion demands it. The solution is therefore to individualise teaching wherever necessary. The duration of lessons, however, often makes it necessary to divide the class into small working groups.

- Literature only appears in the last year of higher secondary education for "B" languages (German and French). It plays a more important part in the English curriculum.

- Text-books and didactic material provide for exercises and tasks adapted to the various levels of the pupils in one class. In this way individualisation and work in groups will enable the more gifted students to make more rapid progress, while the weaker pupils will be able to catch up. A lot of Swedish schools provide premises for this purpose.

- If classical literature occupies a relatively small place in the modern languages curricula, this should be understood as a wish not to confront students with texts that would be too difficult from a linguistic or subject point of view. Stress is laid mainly on modern civilisation.

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Texts of high literary quality have been specially written by authors using a simple vocabulary. A forty page text will only give an average of one new word per page. Literary use is linked to the learning of the language. Individualisation nevertheless makes it possible to confront more gifted pupils with classical authors

- It should be remembered that Strevens pointed out that a language can be learnt very quickly by sticking strictly to the study of that language.

- The method used in curriculum preparation (the curriculum is revised every seven years) makes it possible to introduce the most recent linguistic data. In fact, the working parties carrying out this revision include experts from various disciplines.

G. The Teaching of English 2, Belgium (DECS/EGT (71) 35
Professor Engels, Louvain

Professor Engels' talk gave rise to the following comments and questions: How can transformational linguistics help us to establish an order in a course if no clear idea exists of how it can be applied to teaching? The order and hierarchy that appear in transformational linguistics differ from that required in the course.

Substitution tables are based on the written language. Should not oral structural exercises also be undertaken first of all? Exercises of this type exist for all age and ability levels.

Efforts should be made to counteract the monotony of structural exercises (substitution tables); the influence of these is very limited and they are often boring. They could usefully be replaced by similar exercises starting from micro-situations obliging students to think and to make a reasoned and logical choice. Psycho-linguists have opposed substitution tables because they fail to present "entities".

"Grammar rules" can appear at a certain age level. But they should not be used for young children, but be replaced by series of examples, coloured charts, etc.

In this respect it was pointed out that in the United Kingdom one proceeded from the example of substitutional tables to questions that force students to draw upon familiar situations where they can use the grammatical elements of the basic table.

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Certain delegates agreed on the use of symbols to "visualise" a rule and make it more practical for reminders and the correction of mistakes, for revisions, etc. Agreement was needed on the moment when "generalisations" starting from specific examples could be used. The fact of defining a rule can help students otherwise unable to induce it.

Professor Engels summed up the discussion by admitting that the order introduced in a course had nothing to do with the order proposed by transformational linguistics. His experience only concerned students between 17 and 19 years of age. The tables he suggested were not exercises, but rather a way of understanding the mechanism of a rule through a few examples and allowing better memorising - a visualisation of a mirco-problem. Younger students should certainly go through the oral use of the tables; for others this depended upon the number of hours available. The explanation by rules was a handicap for the student showing him down and obliging him to reflect instead of answering spontaneously.

H. The teaching of French

Mr. Girard spoke on "Practical achievements: the teaching of French" (DECS/EGT (71) 8).

After this lecture, the following questions were raised:

1. What is the place of spelling; do the studies undertaken in this field tend towards simplification?

2. If French, as mother tongue, seems to be mainly responsible for failures at primary level, have those aspects of the study of the language where most difficulty was found been examined? Moreover, on the basis of what fixed criteria is it decided whether a class passes on to the next year or whether it re-sits a year; are these criteria scientifically determined?

Answers:

The place of spelling has been studied by the Rouchette Commission, but it is too early to draw conclusions from an experiment which in fact, is not yet over. It seems unlikely that any reform of spelling will be envisaged in the near future. Moreover, it is not the commission's duty to envisage such a reform.

As regards criteria for determining whether a class re-sits or not, recourse is had to monthly homework which allows an average to be drawn up for the year. The criteria were not, then, scientifically determined but, since the teacher knows his class well, the pitfalls are negligeable. The impression given was rather that the cause of failure lay in the use of unsatisfactory methods.

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III. Group reports and recommendations

Introductory note

The group reports and conclusions that follow, reflect the complex nature of the subject matter. Certain common themes do emerge however, for instance: that grammar and the study of linguistics should be seen primarily as aids to the teaching and learning of languages. That the grammar content - implicit or explicit - of the language teaching should be appropriate to pupils' age and ability levels. That the grammar concepts used in foreign language teaching and learning should correspond to those used for the mother tongue. Delegates were informed of the meetings on the "Mother Tongue Curriculum" (Strasbourg, December 1970) and on "The relationship between the teaching of the mother tongue and foreign languages" (Finland, 1972) planned by the Council of Europe. The Council of Europe had also commissioned a study from Mr. J.L.M. Trim (Cambridge University) on "Processes of second language acquisition and use".

1. English speaking group

Agenda for discussions by English-speaking group

PREAMBLE

A. Statements in discussion about the role of grammar should refer to the teaching of all commonly taught languages rather than be specific to one only (e.g. to English).

B. It is assumed that "grammar" in some form must underlie all foreign language teaching from the earliest stage, although it may not be explicit.

C. Grammar will be considered by the group primarily as an aid to the learning and teaching of foreign language skills at all levels of education (except that of specialist language study in university courses). As a convenient definition of the aims of foreign language teaching in schools, the Ostia report is accepted.

D. The multiple definition of grammar provided by H.H. Stern is accepted as a starting point.

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AGENDA

1. In order to develop language skills, how far is it desirable, or feasible, to produce different descriptive "grammars" for pupils having different mother tongues? What variation in such grammars are then required for pupils at different ages/levels of instruction/ability? To what degree of explicitness are such grammatical descriptions required?

2. What is the role of the mother tongue

   (a) in imparting knowledge of grammar, and

   (b) in establishing grammatical concepts among pupils?

   How far are these concepts then transferable to a foreign language when it is learned?

3. Is a common grammatical terminology (or method of description) for the various languages (including the mother tongue) being taught to pupils in one country desirable or feasible? Is a common terminology possible for international use?

4. How far should the teacher's explicit knowledge of grammar of a particular language be different from that he is expected to impart to his pupils? Does this imply a qualitative as well as a quantitative difference?

5. What contributions can be made by certain techniques of linguistics to language teaching, particularly

   (a) structuralism,

   (b) transformational grammar,

   (c) contrastive analysis?

Report by the English-speaking group

Preamble

The statements below refer to the role of grammar in relation to the teaching of all languages commonly taught in Europe. It is assumed that "grammar" in some form must underlie all foreign language teaching from the earliest stage, although it may not always be explicit.

Grammar was considered primarily as an aid to the learning and teaching of language skills at all levels of education (except that of specialist language study in university courses). As a convenient definition of the aims of foreign language teaching in schools, that of the Ostia report is accepted.

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As a basis for the following report the multiple definition of grammar by H.H. Stern * is accepted (briefly: "Grammar A" represents the competence of the native speaker; "Grammar B" represents the description of this competence in so far as it is possible; "Grammar C" represents the competence intended to be achieved by the foreign learner and "Grammar D" the description of this for teaching purposes).

The presentation of grammar

Grammar (in the sense of Stern's Grammar "D") is often taught implicitly through the careful design and ordering of the material within a comprehensive language course. At some stages, however, a more explicit presentation may be valuable to ensure economy of learning; this may be in the form of review sections of a course or as an auxiliary grammar book for ready reference.

It follows that the presentation of grammar (as distinct from its formulation) is often more a question of methodology than linguistics and must be suited to the capacity of the learner and justified according to its value to him. On both linguistic and pedagogical grounds different formulations of the grammar of a foreign language are desirable for pupils having a different mother tongue, varying in emphasis or depth to suit their ages, stages of progress, purposes and abilities.

The role of the mother tongue

In dealing with grammar in the classroom, it is desirable to use the target language as much as possible. However, in so far as the systematisation of grammatical knowledge becomes necessary, the mother tongue may sometimes be the clearest economical medium for explanation of particular problems.

Children may acquire certain grammatical concepts through their experience of using their mother tongue (e.g. gender or inflection), which may either conflict with or accord with those of the target language. Teachers of the mother tongue and of the target language could profitably consider these problems together and see how far any explicit grammatical teaching in the mother tongue and target language could be co-ordinated.

Grammatical terminology

Varying grammatical terminology applied to one or more target languages can obviously be confusing to pupils. It is noted, however, that the same terms may sometimes be applied to different grammatical features in different languages especially when mother tongue terminology is applied to the target language, and this leads to fake parallels and a confusion of usage.

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* In "Grammar in Language Teaching", Modern Languages, 1963

As long as a common terminology is not available it seems necessary to employ one specific to, and derived from, each target language, although this often needs to be made more self-consistent. We believe, however, that there is a need to establish certain grammatical universals from which a simple interlingual pedagogical terminology might be derived, and that this is a subject for immediate research. How far items from the existing "common stock" of traditional terms could serve this purpose should also be investigated.

Linguistic knowledge and the teacher

The teacher's own knowledge of the target language should (within Stern's multiple definition) comprise not only grammars C and D, but also some understanding of grammar B, in order to equip him to select, grade and devise suitably authentic teaching materials and to identify appropriate styles and registers in the target language.

His training should include some study of recent and current linguistic theory. The closest co-operation between teachers and linguists is necessary to ensure that relevant findings of general and applied linguistics contribute to the improvement of language teaching.

For real progress to be made, the findings of linguists and the needs of teachers must regularly be communicated to both.

French-speaking group

Linguistics and pedagogy

The group adopted an essentially pedagogic position. It felt that linguistics could be useful in so far as it enables teachers to obtain better results. The teacher must use all sources that permit him to understand better the working of the languages concerned. For this reason, linguistic data should be included in the curriculum.

Linguistics will be useful to didactics, to the authors of text-books and to teachers. Since each language has its own way of seizing and analysing reality, in other words its own structure, contrastive linguistics can contribute to a better understanding of the two languages to be studied. It will also point out to the teacher possibilities of interference and assist him to foresee the appropriate exercises.

The group therefore recommended that a European centre and national centres for documentation and information on general and applied linguistics should be set up under the co-ordination of the CCC; these centres could make research

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results available to teachers at all levels. The group also recommended the standardisation of terminology, thus making it intelligible to all teachers. It was also felt that an initiation into linguistics was justified but that it depended upon the level of training given to teachers. In no case could the teaching of linguistics replace that of grammar, but it could complete it. Although the teaching of linguistics as a subject belongs to the university, a certain initiation could take place in the higher classes of secondary education.

The place of grammar in the teaching of modern languages

Traditional grammar, criticised by all linguistic schools, gives teachers certain useful information on the written language. Generally, the place of grammar in education depends upon two categories of variable factors:

1. the type of education, its aims and objectives

2. the age, intellectual level and social and cultural background of the students.

Principle: the teaching of grammar must come after the functional acquisition of the language. It cannot precede this acquisition nor can it draw attention to linguistic data that the student has not yet assimilated by practice. The essential function of language as a means of communication should be stressed. The teaching of language must be situational, it must start from a live situation. The presentation of language facts is done by means of dialogues. Every exercise should contribute to the enrichment of the students possibilities of expression. There can thus be no question of mechanical, meaningless exercises. Since language is a whole, grammar should not be the subject of a separate study. The mother tongue develops a feeling for grammar and the basic mechanisms of the second language. Since linguistic universals emerge implicitly, they will be used as an element of the methodology of the teaching in the target language. Certain universals may be given as examples: the subject-predicate group, the active-passive group, word order in sentences, the notion of modality, of interrogation, of affirmation, determination, and indetermination, the motion of speech or descriptive language, agreement, mechanisms for highlighting words, notions of direct or indirect speech.

What grammar?

1. At primary and secondary level schools, it is the grammar of the authentic spoken language of the educated speaker which will be taught. As for the grammar of the written language, it will be that of contemporary written expression.

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2. Grammar will be centred on the study of the working of the language. Care will be taken to avoid an excess of semantism and abuse of grammatical terminology.

3. Since language is a whole, particular attention will be given to prosodic elements.

4. At an advanced level, connections will be established between style and grammar whenever such a study can contribute to a better understanding of the text and the style.

5. The group drew attention to the text by A.H. Stern "Grammar in language teaching", par. 4:

A good grammar is authentic, theoretically explicit and consistent, clear and economical.

"Authentic" - In presenting the facts of a language it describes these as they are. If the grammar claims to be a grammar of contemporary language it must be based on recent observations and recordings and must be verifiable by empirical tests.

"Theoretically explicit and consistent" - The analysis of the language data is based on an understanding of grammatical theory and it explains its theoretical assumptions and strives to be consistent, although this does not necessarily mean that only one theory is implied, it could be a deliberate choice of eclecticism among several theories.

"Clear and economical" - A good grammar presents its analysis in an understandable way and as briefly as possible. It is in this respect that much recent work is disappointing, it often appears much more abstruse than it need be.

6. Information provided by recent research into grammar will be taken into account.

7. It should not be forgotten that languages develop. Care should be taken to avoid excessive purism with regard to phonetics, vocabulary and structures. It is this excess of purism that might slow down the spontaneous expression of the students. The group recommended to working teachers to go abroad to renew their contact with the languages they have to teach.

Method

1. The methodology of the teaching of grammar must take into account the age of pupils and the objectives of the teaching.

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2. Functional analysis must start from a given context.

3. The teaching of grammar starts from, and returns to, practice. Intensive manipulation of basic structures, taken from a text, will illuminate the structural constants and variations, the mechanisms of which can be examined thoroughly by systematic exercises.

4. The group accepted the careful use of a formalisation adopted to pupils' ages and abilities. The dangers inherent in the practice of using lists of isolated elements applied to grammatical facts and then learnt by heart was pointed out the inhibiting and bad effect of this practice has been proved by educational psychology. The frequency with which these formalised elements are used should be taken into account. More or less exhaustive lists are only acceptable as a means of reference.

5. The group felt that periodic syntheses were necessary but that they depended upon the level of teaching.

6. The principle of the "echo-fifth" moment in language teaching (Gélisson) deserves particular attention. In any method, the final determination of linguistic facts must be ensured. The principle of the echo, that provides for systematic use according to a certain diagram seems to be indicated for the effective teaching of a language.

7. The use of the mother tongue is not to be rejected when it can help to make certain explanations clearer and when it can save time.

8. Comparison will only be fruitful if the pupils have a thorough implicit and explicit knowledge of both languages.

Conclusions and recommendations

1. The group proposed that systematically-controlled experiments be conducted. These experiments would give more exact information on certain problems arising from the teaching of modern languages.

2. It is essential to encourage, in each CCC member State, research into the psycholinguistics of the acquisition of the mother tongue and of second languages, since language courses must be based on such research.

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3. To ensure that the maximum benefit is derived from CCC meetings, the group recommended that the CCC organise preliminary meetings of experts from a number of disciplines who would draw up a detailed work programme to be given to participants one month before the meeting.

Report of the mixed group

1. In a first stage of learning a foreign language (this can last for a period of two years), for young pupils (about 10 to 12 years) without any previous experience, we recommend the application of an integral, direct method, based mainly on imitation (repetitions) to acquire automatic responses.

Thus grammar will never be the object of the course at this stage.

Simple explanations (possibly in the target language) could however be given if the need arises.

We would advise the teachers to avoid grammatical terminology as much as possible.

To reassure certain pupils who feel the need for more abstract explanations, the teacher may supply such information to those children individually.

2. In the following two years (intermediate stage), the main aim of language teaching will be to enable the pupils to acquire and retain the basic automatic responses of the spoken language. So the application of the direct method will still be the main activity of the course, in order to achieve specific aims.

A large number of pupils are satisfied with pragmatic knowledge. Certain pupils, however, feel the need for more thorough understanding. Theoretical explanations could help such pupils to acquire the language and also give them a greater feeling of security.

Through these explanations, the pupils capable of doing so will gain insight into the specific structures of the language they are studying and thus acquire and develop a capacity for analysis and synthesis.

These explanations will never be in the form of dogmatic grammar. At this stage all "grammar" should remain inductive.

These explanations will be formulated preferably in the target language: however, care should be taken to ensure that the terminology used is thoroughly understood by all pupils and corresponds to their intellectual level.

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3. Whatever the option taken by the student at the third level (terminal level for secondary education), the spoken language remains in the foreground. Theoretical explanations will, to a greater extent, be based on the written language.

For this purpose we especially recommend teachers to draw their materials from contemporary texts, excluding those which deviate too much from current uses.

The approach will always be mainly inductive but revision syntheses will be allowed. Grammar will probably, of necessity, be rather traditional, but since it is based on the comparison of the target language with the mother tongue, it will have contrastive aspects.

The aim is to enable the pupils to be more creative and spontaneous in written composition.

On the other hand, at this stage, we recommend that the students be initiated in the use of a grammar as a book of reference. This can teach them personal, general research and, at the same time, encourage them to make the necessary revisions.

This should help them to work independently and enable them to do the necessary revisions on their own.

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IV. Conclusions and recommendations (synthesis of the groups' findings)

Rapporteur's summing up

After hearing the various specialists in applied linguistics, the three groups responsible for drafting the conclusions and recommendations of the Governmental Symposium in Brussels arrived at the same basic views, though they sometimes differed in form. These might be summed up as follows.

It should be emphasised that all the delegates agreed that an organisation for the teaching of grammar at secondary level was by no means the first requirement. The most important thing was to view the problem from the teacher's standpoint. The presentation of grammar was a question of method rather than of linguistics. Modern linguistic research was of interest to language teachers in so far as it led to a teaching method that took account of the age and ability of the pupils and the aims pursued (cf. the Ostia Symposium, May 1966).

Nevertheless language teachers should be informed during their training and periodical refresher courses of developments in modern linguistic research and the current situation; this could only serve to make them more aware of the nature of the language or languages they were teaching and to encourage them to use of more up-to-date and lively methods. On this point the groups expressed a unanimous desire for a European centre, under the auspices of the CCC, which would collect information and documentation from regional centres and distribute it. Such information would also serve as a guideline for authors when preparing text-books or bringing them up to date. Also the naming of categories and the terminology, once released from the strait-jacket of Latin grammar, should be standardised, so as to avoid the confusion which arose when similar terms were used for totally different concepts. The members of the Symposium also thought it was time to go further with research into psycholinguistics, so that teachers could gain some insight into the psychological processes involved in learning languages.

Grammar was still of prime importance and fundamental to all modern language teaching. The level of grammar to be taught could be defined according to the categories described by Stern (cf. "Grammar in Language Teaching" in Modern Languages, 1968), which might be summed up as follows:

Grammar A: Competence of the native speaker

Grammar B: Description of that competence

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Grammar C: Useful competence which the foreign learner intends to achieve

Grammar D: Description of this for teaching purposes.

The working parties recommended an integral direct method, chiefly based on immitation (repetition, to be followed up periodically by revision syntheses using the "echo" principle defined by Gélisson). They placed their hopes mainly in contrastive linguistics, which seemed to them the best suited, for didactic and practical reasons, for compiling an index of "universals", pointing out the dangers of mistakes and interference from the mother tongue and helping textbook writers and teachers to compile the most effective and "economical" exercises.

Thus, bearing in mind the levels defined at the Ankara Symposium (September 1966, doc. EGT (66) Stage XXIV, 2), one might consider the teaching of grammar in the following stages:

I. Elementary level A and B (2 years):

Integral direct method, chiefly based on imitation (repetition) in order to acquire automatic responses. Grammar taught at this level would be based on the authentic spoken language of an educated speaker. Explanations might be given individually to pupils who expressed a desire or need for them. Formal terminology should be avoided in such cases. One should bear in mind the importance of prosodic elements (intonation, stress, tempo, rhythm etc.). Written work should also be based on the contemporary language.

II. Intermediate level (2 years):

Retention and/or acquisition of automatic responses. A direct inductive method would still be essential. Most pupils would still only require a pragmatic, functional knowledge of grammar, sufficient for what they wished to express. In revision syntheses and periodical review sessions (Gélisson's "echo") rules might be tentatively formulated. It would be better to formulate them simply, in the target language.

III. Advanced level (2 years):

The approach will remain inductive. Theoretical instruction would still follow the functional acquisition of the language. It would still have to be set in the context of live situations and never based on purely mechanical exercises.

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Theoretical explanations would be based more particularly on the written language of contemporary texts. The revision syntheses would be more penetrating and wherever possible should be based on contrastive linguistics. It should not be forgotten that at this level the main aim is to help the pupil to express himself more easily and spontaneously in writing original compositions. This would also be the time to initiate pupils in the use of a good grammar as a book of reference. At this advanced stage, teachers might introduce study of the relationship between style and grammar, in order to contribute to a better understanding of the language and the authors studied.

Some people felt that pupils could be given a preliminary introduction to the work of modern linguistics.

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V. Rapporteur's final summary

When you return to your various countries you will have to decide whether this Council of Europe governmental symposium in Brussels has lived up to your expectations. I think that at any rate we shall have convinced you that here, in the country of Breughel and Rubens, earthly food is held in a certain esteem ... and that we do try to harmonise it with spiritual food.

In tackling such a vast, complex, and even at present controversial subject, we could not hope to find, in one short week, all the final, practical and immediately applicable solutions, which language teachers of all grades have been awaiting for years.

However, one thing seems to me worth pointing out. For perhaps the first time in the history of the governmental symposia held by the Council of Europe as part of its Major Project on language teaching - the story of which has been so clearly outlined to us by Dr. Riddy - we have had a symposium, or more precisely a friendly and constructive meeting, between representatives of university teachers and of those responsible for teaching modern languages to European children. Where, hitherto, there seemed to be an almost unbridgeable gulf, we have now been shown ways of spanning it, each side meeting the other half way, and suggestions have been made for the specific roles which these two separate entities - on the one side the university and its research centres, and on the other elementary and secondary education - can or should play in a sphere which is of interest to us all.

One of the main lessons we have learned from the various talks we have had from eminent people from the world of linguistic research is that research, in all its different branches, will not necessarily, nor immediately, have any practical application for us, in our more modest endeavours. Several speakers, particularly Professors Roulet and Nickel, showed fairly clearly the possibilities, but also the limitations, of their research as far as immediate and effective application to modern language teaching is concerned.

Professor Palmer demonstrated to us, using some very concrete examples, the implications of this research, which can often be conducted only in fairly restricted areas of linguistics. He showed us that the methods used are almost totally different from the practical solutions which we might draw from this research and that one must be careful in setting up classifications and categories for use in our teaching.

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In his lucid and authoritative address Mr. Roulet whilst stressing the dangers, or limitations, of over hasty application of research conclusions, nevertheless pointed out to what extent these conclusions could make a major contribution to the reform of grammar teaching. He gave us a timely warning against allowing present controversies, misgivings or apparent contradictions to "be used as an excuse for returning to traditional teaching methods or for compiling a mere set of recipes for the use of audio-visual techniques". He also stressed the need to differentiate from now on between the spoken and the written language, particularly in the special field which we have been considering this week. In any case we need a new and satisfactory description of language, and the methodology of this grammar is linked to our conception of it and to certain learning patterns which can be understood only through psycholinguistics. We should also analyse the linguistic needs of society and should relate levels of competence to categories of individuals according to their age, their intellectual ability or their professional needs. At secondary level Mr. Roulet was in favour of introducing meditation on the nature of language which, if it only helped us to a better understanding of the workings of the mind, would make a valuable contribution to intellectual development.

Then Professor Nickel spoke to us about contrastive linguistics, a science which is still new and which, in its search for universals and its analysis of mistakes, has some bearing on language teaching. This research is twofold, seeking to describe language more accurately and to set up more practical rules. But like the other speakers, Professor Nickel emphasised that his branch of linguistics could not provide any recipe and that it was up to us as teachers to try out the ideas produced in linguistic research. To a certain extent that is what Professor Engels did. In his dual role as scholar and teacher, he proposed some solutions to the problems of grammar teaching, based on the psychology of learning, which are of a more practical nature - memory tables, which he calls "mediators", based on symbols, which seem to him more efficacious than formulating and memorising grammatical rules.

He too made it clear that the order, the hierarchy, which we bring into a course has nothing to do with the order proposed, for example, by transformational linguistics. Here again, linguistic research and methodology do not necessarily coincide.

Mr. Bausch's description of the situation in grammatical research in the Federal Republic of Germany does not seem to be unanimously accepted by his compatriots, but it was clear from his remarks that this research had begun to shake the old traditional ideas and that this work might provide us with a method of tackling linguistic problems whereby the teaching of German would become more effective and closer to the reality of a living language.

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Mr. Johansson, who spoke to us of the problems of language teaching in Sweden, naturally viewed those problems more from the point of view of a teacher than of a linguist. He explained the attempt made in his country to integrate functional grammar in the course, bearing in mind that English was studied from the age of nine and aiming at increased individualisation of learning, adapted to the ability, the means and the needs of each pupil. To this end as many specialists as possible, including linguists, are involved in the preparation of curricula.

In his lecture on French, Mr. Girard emphasised how research into its teaching as a foreign language had led to a far-reaching revision of ideas about it as a mother tongue. The Rouchette Commission, after its unhappy discovery of the large number of failures in elementary schools, had submitted a programme for far reaching reforms in grammar teaching, attempting to combine spontaneous expression and conscious reflection. This approach will be in vain unless the best linguists, psychologists, educationalists and teachers are able to co-operate closely in interdisciplinary research.

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It became abundantly clear from the heated group discussions, the controversies, the reservations expressed and the opinions revised, how interesting all the participants found the problem which brought us together this week. Although the group reports seem to present divergent opinions and trends, some constants have emerged, clearly showing that all the delegates were moved by the same concerns.

Among the suggestions taken up by each group, the idea of keeping teachers informed of the work and material results of linguistic research recurs like a Leitmotiv.

Underlying the superficial differences and the careful qualifications, the themes which seem to have recurred constantly in your work are these: an inductive approach to grammar, based on active use of the language before any study of the phenomena; a careful progression towards theoretical explanations; a search for universals and an effective and adequate common terminology for teaching purposes; the need to distinguish different levels of grammar, based on Stern's definitions, and to differentiate between the spoken language

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and the contemporary written language; possible use of the mother tongue where it may make explanations clearer and provide useful comparisons; the need for periodical syntheses; and the need to keep in mind at all times the age of the pupils, their intellectual abilities and the aims pursued.

At any rate we seem to be far from having exhausted the subject. A great many of you have expressed a wish for help from psycholinguists, for the formation of a European centre to collect and redistribute information from national or regional centres, for multidisciplinary meetings, for further research into learning patterns and as Dr. Roulet suggested, for linguistic research to be directed towards aims more nearly concerned with the problems of teaching.

But before any of this can come to pass, we must work; we have pupils demanding our immediate attention. We must make the best use of the tools we have. At the end of this Symposium we might meditate on the lesson expressed in my native dialect in this pithy proverb "While the oats are growing, the horse is dying".

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